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Articles in Today's Clips

Monday, April 21, 2008

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Friday, April 18, 2008

Detroit School Board member to be tried on child neglect allegations

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- A Wayne County judge ruled Friday there is enough evidence against Detroit School Board member Reverend David Murray to have a jury decide whether his children should be removed from his care over abuse and neglect complaints.

Circuit Court Judge Mark Slavens set a June 18 date for the trial on a petition filed by the state Department of Human Services alleging Murray's four adopted boys, a stepson and a biological daughter lived in slovenly conditions and didn't get enough to eat.

Murray, 55, and Darryl Jefferson, the biological father of his stepson, claim the allegations were fabricated by the school board member's estranged wife, Tanisha Murray, 35. A social services investigation concluded that the allegations had merit, and Murray has since made some repairs to the home.

Slavens denied Murray's request for unsupervised visitation with the children, ages 2-16, but ordered that both parents be allowed supervised visitation. He also ordered that neither David Murray nor Tanisha Murray discuss any aspects of the case with their children. Jefferson, 40, who has been caring for his son since the children were removed from the Murrays' Oak Drive home on March 31, was granted continued temporary custody of his child.

Two of the adopted boys were placed in foster care, and the biological daughter is staying with relatives. One of the adopted boys is currently in a juvenile detention facility, and another ran away from home and a writ has been filed for his apprehension.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Springer custody hearing postponed

Saturday, April 19, 2008

BY LYNN TURNER

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388-8564

CENTREVILLE -- A custody hearing was postponed Friday for two sisters of a 16-year-old girl who was chained to her bed when she died in a fire in February.

St. Joseph County Probate Judge Thomas E. Shumaker said an investigation into allegations of abuse and neglect against the girls' parents, Anthony and Marsha Springer, is ongoing and rescheduled the hearing for May 22.

"I understand that as time passes, it raises anxieties and emotions," Shumaker said of the delay. "(But) sometimes it's necessary."

In an abuse-and-neglect petition filed last month, the St. Joseph County Prosecutor's Office alleges the Springers had a long history of confining their daughter Calista to her bed. A Michigan State Police trooper testified in March that after the Feb. 27 fire at the family's house on West Burr Oak Street, he saw Calista's body in her bed with a dog choke collar around her waist. The collar was secured to the bed rail with a plastic tie, the trooper said.

The Springers' other daughters, ages 12 and 14, are currently staying with relatives. The girls were not in court Friday, but their parents and attorneys were there, along with Michigan Department of Human Services workers.

Shumaker ordered that the Springers could continue weekly supervised, two-hour visits with the girls.

"Unsupervised is not a good idea at this point," Shumaker said.

Meanwhile, state police continue their investigation into the fire and have said they intend to forward their findings to the prosecutor's office for review.

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04/18/2008

Child found, dies

The Huron Daily Tribune

TUSCOLA COUNTY — A search for a missing child ended in tragedy Wednesday. According to a press release from the Tuscola County Sheriff's Department, deputies and Michigan State Police troopers from the Caro Post were dispatched Wednesday to 1752 Hurds Corner Road in Ellington Township for a missing child. The mother, Anna Marie Luchenbill, 30, reported that her son, Daniel Mark Brink, 1, was missing. They had been searching the out buildings and along White Creek which is at the back of the property. A K-9 unit from MSP Bridgeport was dispatched to the location.

The residence is on the east side of the road, approximately 50 feet from the roadway. There are woods surrounding the residence on the south and east side with White Creek flowing through the back of the property. The current was very swift moving in a southwesterly direction. Trooper Steve Escott, Deputy Ryan Pierce and two family members were searching along the bank of White Creek when the child was spotted in the water. Officers jumped in and pulled the child from the water and began CPR.

Other deputies, troopers and Mobile Medical Response (MMR) responded and continued CPR until they reached Caro Community Hospital. The child was dead at the hospital. Dr. Varani was scheduled to perform an autopsy.

MSP troopers, MSP K-9 unit, Kingston police department, MMR and Caro Fire Department assisted at the scene. The Tuscola County Sheriff's Mounted Division and Tuscola County Sheriff's Marine Division were on standby.

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Parents, authorities work to protect children from sexual abuse crimes

- by Yvonne Swager

Montmorency County Tribune

April 16, 2008

Numbers of reported crimes against children are decreasing, but that may not mean fewer crimes are being committed.

"Sexual abuse has been declining over the last 10 or 15 years, partly because people are talking about it more," said Janis Wolak, research assistant professor at the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center.

Parents should be candid with children regarding how inappropriate it is for sex, even in the form of passing comments, to be introduced into some relationships.

"Parents need to be open with children and acknowledge the fact having sexual feelings is normal, but also there are adults out there who will take advantage of that," Wolak said.

Many offenders are not violent and have high levels of social skills, she said, but they don't know how to form sexual relationships with adults.

"They may be immature in some ways, and youths don't always recognize that," Wolak said.

Many policies have been put in place to help protect children, she said, such as scouting programs that require two unrelated adults be present with children. Parents don't need to be nervous about every situation.

"We don't want to foster suspicions of everyone, but there need to be open discussions," according to Wolak.

It's important for people to realize there is no stereotype for people who abuse children, she said, and abused children are usually victims of people they know.

Montmorency County currently has 34 individuals listed in the Michigan Sex Offender Registry. In 2005, 14 individuals in the county were charged with criminal sexual conduct. By 2007, that number dropped to four.

According to Terrie Case, county prosecutor, that doesn't necessarily mean the situation is improving.

"I think people just aren't getting caught," Case said.

As the former assistant prosecutor in Monroe, Case said she handled a variety of criminal sexual conduct cases. When she began working in Montmorency County, she said she was shocked.

"Initially when I started here, there seemed to be more of those cases than anything," Case said. "There seemed to be just as many cases up here, and the population there was much greater."

In some situations here, she said victims had been abused for years. She said she was persistent in pursuing convictions in those cases, even though some of the convictions took as long as three years.

Case said she plans to continue pursuing convictions of those who commit crimes against children and is ready to take on a new aspect of criminal behavior. Internet predators are becoming more of a problem, she said, and she's looking to attend a seminar for prosecutors to gain more insight.

"I want to learn more about how these crimes are committed and how to prosecute them," she said.

Stop It Now! has a hotline to help both victims of sexual abuse and those who think they may eventually harm a child. Those who would like to contact the hotline can call 1-800-4-A-Child or 1-800-422-4453.



Slew of arrests has netted \$38,731 in back child support

Sunday, April 20, 2008

By Danielle Quisenberry

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The woman who answered the door insisted the Jackson man who lived there wasn't home, but the Nikes sitting in the entryway indicated she might be lying.

Within a few moments, the 40-year-old father of six was being handcuffed and hauled out of an upstairs bedroom by Jackson County Warrant Officer Holly Finco, who spotted the sneakers and searched the house.

Two of his children watched as he was taken under protest. His daughter, 14, was in tears.

The man owed about \$11,000 in unpaid child support, amassed since he lost custody of his two teenage daughters about three years ago, and missed a court date. A judge issued a warrant for his arrest.

He was one of nine men and women arrested on a Saturday in February as Finco and Jackson County Sheriff's Deputy Todd Whiting knocked on doors in Jackson County, trying to find people who had evaded the Friend of the Court system.

The man arrested and others in this story aren't being named because the Citizen Patriot generally doesn't identify people charged with misdemeanors.

There are about 1,900 outstanding warrants at any given time for men or women in Jackson County who fail to pay child support and miss court dates, Finco said. Many are arrested -- and some never write a check.

Since January, Finco and deputies have arrested at least 80 people on random weekend nights, times when parents don't expect they'll be caught. In doing so, they collected \$38,731 for parents and their children and resolved another \$77,786 when custodial parents forgave debt owed by arrested parents.

Last year, they arrested 244 people and resolved about \$259,952 of child-support debt. About \$120,000 of that was paid to custodial parents. Mothers or fathers forgave the remaining \$139,815.

In Jackson County, parents owe about \$110 million in delinquent child-support payments, said Jackson County Friend of the Court Director Andy Crisenbery.

Some parents get accustomed to occasional or inconsistent payments.

"You get to the point you don't expect it," said a Napoleon Township mom, who has three sons ages 16, 10 and 3 and has had trouble collecting child support.

"I had my first son when I was 19. We stood in Salvation Army lines. You just make do."

From her second husband, she said she gets regular payments that pay for ice cream stops, trips to Wal-Mart and medical bills.

Her first husband often pays only when the courts force it, she said. "If there is a way around the system, he finds it," she said.

He never got arrested, she said.

Those arrested during sweeps are taken to the Jackson County Jail, where they put their belongings in a plastic bag, leave their fingerprints and stay until they pay about 25 percent of what they owe or face formal charges the following business day.

Money collected in the sweeps likely goes directly back into the economy as custodial parents quickly spend it on food, clothing, shelter or other items for children, Crisenbery said.

Getting the child-support payments that result from an arrest can give parents on the verge of seeking welfare the aid they need and, most importantly, help meet the needs of children, he said.

"I use it for school clothes and food," said a Summit Township woman, 28, who briefly was married to the 40-year-old father of six mentioned earlier. The two have a 4-year-old son.

Crisenbery said the sweeps are funded with document fees collected in Michigan county clerks' offices and given to the state, which had intended to use the money for a state-wide Friend of the Court warrant system that never materialized.

When the statewide plan fell apart as a result of Michigan's budget concerns, the state sent the money back to counties, which would use the dollars for warrant-arrest efforts, Crisenbery said.

Since last year, Jackson County has received about \$78,000 for the program.

"Those sweeps are an effective tool, especially for these people who have larger arrears and haven't taken any steps to deal with them," said Jackson County Circuit Judge Thomas Wilson.

Still, hundreds of people indebted to the guardians of their children are out there and the sweeps put only a small dent in the money owed.

"You have people that tell you they will never, ever pay," said Finco, who was flipping through a stack of warrants and paperwork as she and Whiting searched for addresses of alleged deadbeats in February.

They look for people when they have new information about their whereabouts or have gotten complaints from a custodial parent.

Finco said they will do the sweeps about every week until the state-distributed money dries up. They drive an unmarked car, wear jeans with guns holstered on their hips and speak sternly.

The people they encounter know who they are and aren't always honest about the location of their son, girlfriend or husband who is behind on payments.

Sometimes, the windows are dark and no one is home. Other times, the parent's last listed address is incorrect. People do not always update their addresses as they are supposed to, which can make finding them difficult.

Occasionally, people flee, hoping to avoid arrest.

Officers aim to nab one mother or father an hour, Whiting said.

After their arrests, the parents appear before a Circuit Court judge. The judge often orders them to pay a portion of what they owe or spend time in jail.

Of the nine arrested in a Feb. 16 sweep, at least two opted for jail time.

If picked up a first time, they can be ordered to as many as 45 days in jail. If arrested a second or subsequent time, they face up to 90 days in jail, Crisenbery said.

Others who have made legitimate attempts at finding employment are given leniency; payment arrangements are made.

"You really have to look at each case and look at the case histories and try to sort out the people who are really trying to find jobs and can't and the ones that are just plain deadbeats," Wilson said.

The 40-year-old Jackson man was in jail less than three days, paying \$650 and avoiding further time.

“All my money goes toward my kids,” he told Finco and Whiting after he was placed in handcuffs. “I just paid \$2,000 for my daughter's braces, but none of that matters.”

Others owe much more.

A Brooklyn man who has a 17-year-old daughter owes about \$42,000, even though he is employed.

He was to begin paying child support when he was divorced in 1992. After his arrest in February, he was ordered to spend 60 days in jail or pay \$3,200. He remained in jail until April 8. He had indicated to Wilson he would pay the full amount he owes by cashing in his 401K.

Whiting and Finco found him asleep in his pickup truck, listening to music outside his home.

Others are unable to pay much of anything, often because they are unemployed.

“Right now, I'm looking for a job. I just ain't found nothing yet,” said a pregnant Jackson woman, 29, who owed \$1,500 and was arrested during the sweep. She has two children and has an 11th-grade education. After her arrest, Wilson ordered her to pay \$450 or spend 30 days in jail; she paid after about a week in jail, Finco said. Her present husband receives welfare checks.

“The realities are that the jobs are hard to find,” Wilson said.

Making it more difficult, some who owe child support have felony records, and more companies are doing background checks, Wilson said.

He said he sends people who cannot find work to Work First programs, operated out of Michigan Works! agencies, which provide job-search and employment-support services, training and education.

Judges then follow up on the cases to make sure parents are making an effort to be employed.

To encourage people who are able to get jobs to keep them and regularly pay child support, Wilson introduced the “pay or stay” program.

He determines the sum individuals can reasonably pay every week. If they do not pay, they have to spend the weekend in a holding cell at the county jail. This way, they keep their jobs and learn a lesson.

“If you do one weekend in the tank, you are going to do your utmost to not go back there again,” Wilson said.

This also can help people who do not have jobs. Wilson will order them to pay maybe \$25 a week to stay out of jail for the weekend.

They can collect cans, go without cigarettes or do whatever they have to do to pay, he said.

He said the sweeps are successful at forcing people who have taken no steps to settle their child support debts to appear in court.

Some are simply ignoring their responsibility, he said. For that, they are thrown in jail for 30 days or ordered to pay thousands.

After they are arrested a few times, they often start to realize they had better make some changes, Finco said.

“People get the hint,” she said.



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Benefit needs on rise for kids

Sunday, April 20, 2008

BY DAVID JESSE

The Ann Arbor News

As the economy worsens, local officials are seeing rising demand for services, including low- and no-cost health insurance.

On April 29, the Washtenaw County Public Health Department will hold a Children's Health and Enrollment Fair from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. at 555 Towner, Ypsilanti. Kelly Stupple is children's health insurance advocate at the department.

Q: What's going on at the event?

A: We are focusing on enrolling children in MICHild and Healthy Kids, which are state and federal insurance programs. In addition, we'll have health screenings and activities for the children, like story time and relay races. There will be door prizes as well.

Q: Who should come?

A: Parents should come and bring their kids if they need health insurance, but I also want any families that want health information to come. All are welcome.

Q: Why have this event now?

A: The week from April 27 to May 3 is national Cover the Uninsured Week. We're doing it in the middle of that to highlight the problem.

Q: What do you need to bring to enroll?

A: You need to bring a proof of income, an ID card and Social Security numbers.

Q: How big of a problem is not having insurance?

A: In Michigan, between 5 and 6 percent of kids don't have insurance. Michigan actually does a good job compared to the rest of the nation.

We believe this is because the unions were so strong here. People who might not have had coverage through their employer did through their union's efforts.

However, with the problems in the economy and job losses in unions, we're seeing an uptick in the need for all benefits from insurance to WIC to food stamps.

One of the few programs that's still well funded is MICHild. We're in the position to tell people that we have slots available and that we can take their kids.

Q: Who can qualify for these programs?

A: You can be employed and own your own home and still qualify. For example, for four people in a family, the top limit is a gross yearly earnings of \$42,400.

You could have two parents working \$20,000 jobs or one parent with a \$40,000 job and still qualify.

People are still eligible even if their employers offer benefits. For example, if someone is working somewhere and has a high (co-pay) and they qualify in the income levels, they can use these programs.

Q: How much do they cost?

A: Healthy Kids is free and MICHild is \$10 per month for all of a family's kids.

Q: Why should the community want kids to have insurance?

A: The first argument is we want kids to go to the doctor and get preventive care and not use the (emergency room) for doctor's visits. Also, having insurance can take a lot of stress off a parent's mind, that if there was a major accident or illness and they didn't have insurance for their children, they'd have to declare bankruptcy or something.

Q: Is there another reason?

A: There's an economic argument as well. Every year, Michigan sends SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) dollars back to the federal government. Every year we don't maximize our use, the dollars get sent back. It's not like it's a bank where we can store them for next year.

Spending those dollars allows us to maximize the use of the dollars in the local health economy.

That's money going into that local doctor's office and going into our local labs.

Q: Where can we get more information?

A: (Go to) www.covertheuninsured.org.

www.michigan.gov/mdch, click on the health care coverage link, then the children and teens link and from there you can click on either Healthy Kids or MICHild for more information.

David Jesse can be reached at djesse@annarbornews.com or at 734-994-6937. Join the discussion at blog.mlive.com/study_hall.

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News

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Medical coalition helps the uninsured

By Dionna Harris

POSTED: April 19, 2008

ESCANABA — Currently an estimated 47 million Americans are living without any form of health insurance. In Michigan alone, it is estimated 1 million or 10.7 percent of the entire population of 9 million are not covered by health insurance.

In an effort to combat these figures, the Delta-Menominee Medical Access Coalition is participating in the national "Cover the Uninsured Week" campaign, which will take place April 27 through May 3, with thousands of activities planned nationally to raise awareness to the plight of the uninsured.

The Medical Access Coalition or MAC is a non-profit organization developed by community representatives and volunteers to assist residents of Delta and Menominee counties with access to affordable health care.

"Some of the services offered by MAC, include providing information and assistance to access affordable health care services," said Mary Williams, R.N. and MAC program coordinator.

Some of the assistance provided to clients of MAC are the issuance of prescription medication cards good for many generic prescriptions and assistance in applying for free or discounted medications.

"Anyone who is a resident of Delta or Menominee County between the ages of 19 and 64, with no health insurance coverage, is eligible for the program. There are also income guidelines which we follow that are based on current federal guidelines," said Williams.

Residents who are not eligible for the MAC program are those who have any form of medical insurance, including Medicaid, Medicare, private or public insurance, anyone with work-related injuries involving workers compensation, and anyone with a pending court case involving medical expenses or injuries.

Since its opening on March 1, 2006, MAC has provided services for 758 residents in Delta and Menominee counties, and has leveraged approximately \$800,000 in donated medications from pharmaceutical companies in addition to paying just under \$48,000 for generic medications purchased by members using their MAC issued pharmacy card.

Dorothy Volpe, of Escanaba, was one of the first residents of Delta County to seek assistance from the coalition staff.

"Living here in Escanaba is hard for many people due to a lack of good paying jobs. When I moved back here, I went to Social Services and they were unable to provide any medical assistance," said Volpe.

Article Photos



Dorothy Volpe, of Escanaba, a client with the Medical Access Coalition of Delta and Menominee Counties, reads the dosing label of one of the medications received through the MAC Prescription Medication Card program. (Daily Press photo by Dionna Harris)

Volpe later learned of the new MAC and when it opened in 2006, found herself impressed not only with the program but also with Williams as program manager and the staff.

"I think that Mary (Williams) is wonderful, in that she was able to find a pharmaceutical company willing to provide free medication, and later, the RX Outreach program which provides a reduced rate at the pharmacy where I purchase my monthly medications," said Volpe.

Volpe currently utilizes the prescription card program offered by the coalition, allowing her to purchase her medications at a rate of \$4 per prescription.

"The coalition provides this small circle of people who work to ensure that those who need medication can afford to purchase their medications. They are very, very helpful. It will be a sad time for me come September, as I am phasing out of the program. However, after September, I will still be covered only this time by Medicare," said Volpe.

"I am very, very, happy with the service provided by the Medical Access Coalition," she said. "They did all the work, and if something was not right, they worked on the issue until it was corrected.

"Perhaps other agencies are as helpful to their clients, but I don't believe that any could be as helpful as the staff members of the Medical Access Coalition," added Volpe.

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A night at the free clinic

By Mardi Suhs

CADILLAC - The doors opened to the free medical clinic at 5 p.m. By 5:30 almost every chair in the waiting room was filled with 20 people waiting to see the doctor.

The room was silent, jarred occasionally by coughing, the deep, hoarse cough of someone in need of medical attention.

Debra Perkins found a lone chair next to a back wall and silently read pamphlets and brochures scattered on the table in front of her.

"I don't like going to the doctor," she admitted. "This is my first time here and I feel more comfortable with my family doctor. So this makes me nervous."

But because Perkins does not have medical insurance, an office visit with her family physician is out of the question.

"I think I might have a bladder infection," she said. "I'm trying to get Medicaid but that takes 30 days. That's why I'm here."

Larry Carnes, 55, waited patiently in a room for Dr. Louis Praamsma, the volunteer doctor on duty.

"I thank God this clinic is here," Carnes immediately offered. "This is my second time here. I was in dire need of seeing a doctor."

Carnes was laid off last November and lost his health insurance.

"I have high blood pressure," he explained. "My heart was pumping heavy. I needed my prescription. Without the clinic it would have been pretty bad. My brain felt like it was on fire. Now I feel good. This is a follow-up visit. I tell these people thank you every time I'm here. I need this medication to live."

The Cadillac Area Community Health Clinic opens its door every Wednesday at 5 p.m. to provide free " primary health care to the uninsured.

Patients are seen on a first-come basis by signing in between 5 and 6:30 p.m. Before treatment, they are screened for eligibility and must meet established " income guidelines.

"Many times the patients we see are in shock," " explained clinic co-director Denise Godfrey.

"They just lost their job and their benefits and they don't know where to go. It's very gratifying. Every week we see someone that's been sick for a long time with no recourse. They come here and they are so appreciative. It's gratifying to me that we are finally able to help them. We do whatever we can to help."

Jack Haynes tried to fight off an upper respiratory infection with over-the-counter meds throughout the winter. Finally, someone told him about the free health clinic.

"I'm laid off. I do seasonal tree work or construction. I haven't had a job with insurance for 15 or 20 years in this state," said the 50-year-old Cadillac man. "I'm getting disgusted. Just about anyplace else would be better to live. I can't afford the food and gas anymore."

Haynes was relieved to discover that his prescription for antibiotics would cost \$4 or less.

"I have no way of paying for any medicine right now, and I know I need it."

Jessie Speaks of Tustin has been to the clinic before. He was relieved that there wasn't a long line like on a previous

visit.

"This is a good place to come," he said. "They need a bigger place."

Speaks is a self-employed handy man who makes his living doing odd jobs. He does not have insurance because, he said, the rates are too high.

"I'm a borderline case," he explained. "I don't make enough for the rates to be affordable. Michigan is in a bad way."

Chad Franklin sat with his wife in the waiting room. The couple has one child and he works at a local pizza place. He is diabetic without insurance.

"An office visit would cost me \$65 or \$75 dollars," he said quietly. "We don't have it. It's hard to come by. We do the best we can on minimum wage. I'm here to get my pills renewed."

"Many other cities don't have this service," Godfrey explained. "It's the volunteers, the doctors, nurses and lay people that volunteer their services to provide this care."

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Free Health Clinic

- What: The Cadillac Area Community Health Clinic is a not-for-profit organization that provides free primary health care to the under or uninsured. In addition, the clinic links people to other resources for ongoing health care at the lowest possible cost.
- When: Wednesday sign-in from 5 to 6:30 p.m. first come-first serve.
- Where: District 10 Health Department, 521 Cobbs St.
- Information: To learn more and to volunteer, call 876-7818.

Patients eligible for care include:

- Homeless
- People with seasonal, low paying, or part time jobs
- Students with no family support
- Unemployed
- Working, single-parent families
- Working, but with no insurance coverage



3:01 am, April 21, 2008

CAPITOL BRIEFINGS

Business leery of state-crafted health care

By [Amy Lane](#)

LANSING — Southeast Michigan businesses are concerned about health insurance costs and the impact of the uninsured on the health insurance system.

But many aren't ready to support a proposed amendment to Michigan's constitution that would require the Legislature to craft universal health care coverage, according to a poll for the **Detroit Regional Chamber**.

The survey, conducted by **John Bailey & Associates Inc.** in preparation for the chamber's upcoming **Mackinac Policy Conference**, found 46 percent of respondents would vote "no" on the proposed constitutional amendment, while 27 percent would vote "yes," and 27 percent had no opinion or were undecided.

At the same time, respondents cited the high cost of health insurance and impact of the uninsured as their top health care concerns.

"We're interpreting that to mean that cost is a real concern, but they're not ready to let the government decide what the cost is," said Sarah Hubbard, the chamber's vice president of government relations. The chamber has not taken a position on the ballot proposal.

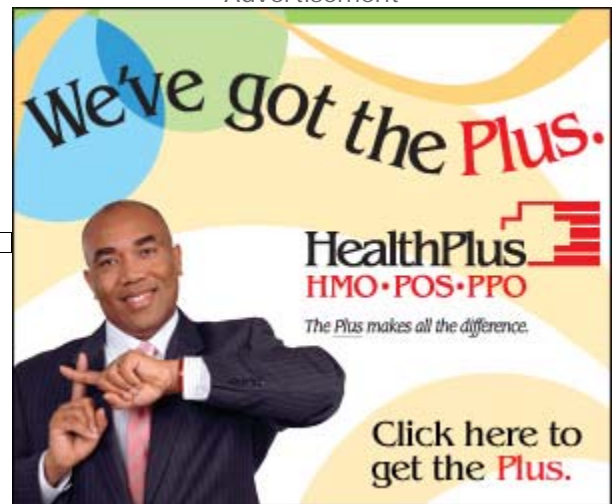
Former state Rep. John Freeman, D-Madison Heights, who is chairing the **Health Care for Michigan** campaign to place the proposal on the November ballot, said poll results indicate the need for "more education of the chamber members" on a proposal that he said benefits business and addresses their health care concerns.

"If you want to reduce the uninsured, then the flip side of eliminating the uninsured is universal health care coverage," Freeman said. "One fundamental way of driving down the high cost of health insurance, for people that currently have it or for employers that are paying for it, is for everybody to have insurance."

Freeman said the cost of uncompensated care results in higher costs for people who do have insurance.

The proposal does not prescribe specifics of universal coverage. Its language requires the Legislature to "pass laws to make sure that every Michigan resident has affordable and comprehensive health care coverage through a fair and cost-effective financing system."

Advertisement



Freeman said he does not expect the Legislature to "provide a Cadillac version of health care benefits," but rather a "basic package" that people need to maintain their health. He said the proposal doesn't mandate government-run health care and leaves it to the Legislature to meet an established framework. The purpose of a broad set of principles, instead of specific reforms, is to drive discussion among unions, business leaders, health care providers, insurance companies and other stakeholders and "bring people together about what makes sense for Michigan," Freeman said.

The proposal's Web site lists support by small businesses, politicians who include Gov. Jennifer Granholm and Lt. Gov. John Cherry, and labor, faith-based, health care and civil rights organizations. No major business organization has endorsed the proposal.

In the poll, 45 percent of respondents, the largest share, ranked the high cost of health insurance as their biggest health care concern. Twenty-four percent cited the impact of the uninsured, while 12 percent named the cost of prescription drugs.

The findings are part of a survey taking the pulse of Detroit-area business on a variety of public policy issues. Troy-based Bailey & Associates conducted the survey of 200 executives from Southeast Michigan companies and organizations in preparation for the Mackinac conference, which runs May 28-31 on Mackinac Island.

The poll covered the topics of state and regional business climate, transportation, alternative energy, education and workforce development, taxation, and politics and public policy.

Findings will help shape political and public policy reforms that the chamber will ask conference attendees to prioritize, ultimately forming an agenda to push forward in coming months.

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Let's hear from recipients on timing of food-stamp distribution

Ann Arbor News

Thursday, April 17, 2008

BY KAMI POTHUKUCHI

Last week, the Michigan House joined the Senate in passing legislation to change the distribution of Bridge Card (food stamp) benefits from once a month to twice a month. Gov. Jennifer Granholm has indicated that she will sign the bill. The proposed law will affect households receiving \$100 or more a month - about 78 percent of the state's caseload.

I urge the governor not to rush to sign this bill into law. First, Bridge Card recipients have not been consulted on how this change will affect them. Second, supporters' claims that households will buy more fresh foods as a result have not been tested.

This change is being pushed by the state's grocers, who face real problems, which deserve thoughtful solutions. In many neighborhoods, food stamps are a big part of stores' revenues. Because benefits are distributed early in the month, such stores face a boom-and-bust monthly business cycle. Other states address this problem by staggering single payments to households throughout the month.

A majority of Bridge Card recipients prefer the status quo, according to a survey sponsored by the Department of Human Services. Because the survey did not ask recipients their benefit amounts, it is dismissed by the proposal's advocates, who argue that opponents of the change will likely be unaffected by it.

Focus groups in an ongoing study in southeastern Michigan led by me, however, raise specific concerns. Users worry about not being able to take advantage of sales, and about getting even less food than before if stores stop offering end-of-the-month sales. Transportation problems, rising gasoline prices and disability threaten to make grocery shopping more difficult for affected seniors and families with special needs. For example,

one Detroit-area parent drives more than 20 miles one way to a specialty store to buy food for his child, who suffers from celiac disease.

Some focus group participants do support a twice-monthly distribution. These include mothers who find it easier to budget for groceries two weeks at a time, and who find the prospect of shorter periods of want every two weeks more bearable than longer periods once a month. Recipients also seek external control over their budgets when they are overwhelmed by requests for food from acquaintances experiencing crises of their own.

Will Bridge Card recipients buy more fresh fruits and vegetables than before? The groups suggest that this is less likely. Recipients who buy fresh foods now already budget and shop weekly. Those who purchase few fresh foods blame inadequate benefit levels, which will be unaffected by the change in distribution. At about \$1 per person per meal, benefits are simply too low to include enough fresh fruits and vegetables, which tend to be more expensive than canned ones.

The governor should hold listening sessions statewide to hear from recipients whose concerns have been conspicuously absent in discussions to date. Perhaps recipients who oppose the proposed change could be allowed opt out and continue to get their benefits once a month. If this is a small number, as grocers suggest, grocers will have nothing to worry about. The governor should make sure that all options are fully considered before she signs the bill.

About the writer: Kami Pothukuchi, an Ann Arbor resident, teaches urban planning at Wayne State University. To contribute essays to Other Voices, contact Mary Morgan, opinion editor, at 734-994-6605 or mmorgan@annarbornews.com.



Summit to focus on homelessness

Saturday, April 19, 2008

By Susan Harrison Wolffis

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WEST MICHIGAN -- They will come from cities in West Michigan and small towns, rural areas and suburbs -- unified, for all their outward differences, in the goal of ending homelessness.

Agency workers, government officials, the once-homeless, community activists, members of the public: All will come together for the first annual Region 3 Homeless Solutions summit from 8 a.m. to noon Tuesday at Muskegon Community College's Stevenson Center, 221 S. Quarterline.

The emphasis will be on "solutions" and "training," says Stacey Vandenberg, deputy director of West Michigan Therapy Inc. and co-chair of the Muskegon County Homeless Continuum of Care.

Keynote speaker Dwight Pledger of Perris, Calif., will set the day's tone with an 8:30 a.m. speech of "hope and restoration."

Once "hooked and homeless," Pledger is president and co-founder of Ray of Hope Ministries, a recovery and restoration "parachurch" organization that supports men and women "coming out of various addictions and destructive lifestyles." He also is an author, workshop leader, speaker, trainer, consultant and mentor for Dwight Pledger Enterprises. Since 2004, he has spoken in 55 cities and 17 countries.

While serving in the U.S. Navy, Pledger was an equal opportunity program specialist and underwent 11 weeks of intensive training at the Department of Defense Race Relations Institute. Pledger learned his speaking skills in Toastmasters International. In 2001, he advanced to the semifinals of the World Championship of Public Speaking.

Among the topics of the workshops: Housing in Your Neighborhood; Funding in Rural Areas; and Fair Housing Center of West Michigan. A panel discussion between tenants and landlords also is scheduled.

The summit is hosted by the Muskegon County Homeless Continuum of Care.

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Michigan Report

April 18, 2008

WELFARE CASES CONTINUE LONG DECLINE

Both regular and extended Family Independence Program cases continued a decline that has lasted more than a year, while Food Assistance Program cases continued to break record highs, according to a report from the Department of Human Services. Total, there were 78,471 FIP cases in March, the [report](#) said, including 5,090 extended cases, where families receive minimal benefits to maintain eligibility for job training and other services. That extended caseload was down from 5,445 cases in February, 6,046 cases in January and 6,152 in December. Those cases continue to track about six months behind changes in the regular caseload, the length of the extended benefits.

Regular assistance cases also continued to fall in March, to 73,381 from 73,851 in February, and 73,985 in January. That caseload has been falling since spring 2007.

The Food Assistance Program set another record high with 590,615 cases in March. That makes five consecutive months of new record highs with 586,024 cases in February, 580,679 cases in January, 575,711 cases in December, 572,769 cases in November and 570,276 cases in October.

Childcare assistance fell again in March to 52,107 cases from 52,139 cases in February, after growing in January to 55,560 cases. The program saw caseloads fluctuate over late summer and early fall.



Thursday, April 17, 2008

Michigan lauded for anti-poverty efforts

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Michigan has been highlighted among a dozen states attempting to fight poverty in a report released Thursday by the Center for Law and Social Policy in Washington, D.C.

The report pointed to a state-sponsored summit to be held in November. It also noted the Michigan Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity will host six forums across the state to find out which programs best help residents lift themselves out of poverty.

Ismael Ahmed, Director of Michigan Department of Human Services was quoted prominently in the report.

"Poverty has quietly become the most important question of our time," Ismael said.

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

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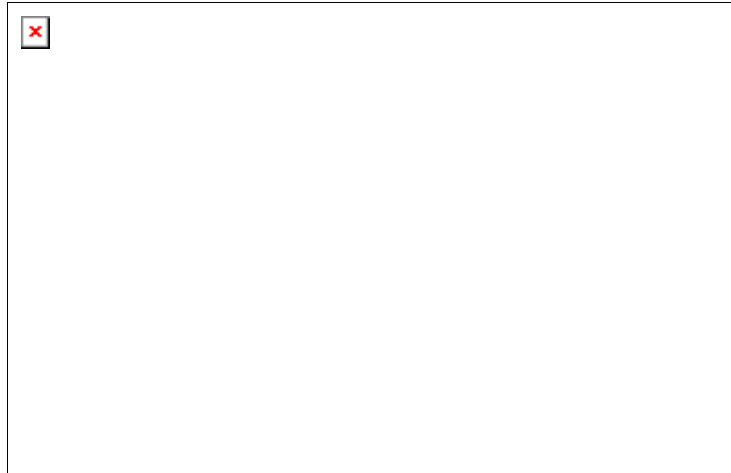
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The Arab American News

Arab American Democrats gear up for 2008 election

By Delia Habhab - The Arab American News
Friday, 04.18.2008, 05:53pm



DEARBORN — Arab American Democrats gathered to discuss the 2008 presidential election, on Saturday, April 12, at the University of Michigan, Dearborn.

Around 70 people showed up for the event to discuss strategies for organizing the Arab American caucus, and to learn about ways to become actively involved in the political process. The gathering hosted a diverse group of attendees, including professionals, community leaders, and students, as well as members of different ethnic communities. The meeting included remarks from Mark Brewer, Chairman of the Michigan Democratic Party.

Taleb Salhab, who helped organize the event, said that the purpose of the meeting was to provide individuals with an opportunity to participate in discussions about the election process.

"The purpose of this gathering was to bring together Arab American Democrats from across the state to discuss ways to organize for the upcoming presidential election," he stated. "We wanted to give our community members the opportunity to engage with representatives of the two candidates, as well as the chairman of the Michigan Democratic Party. This was their chance to ask the questions they needed to ask, and hear more about what each candidate is offering."

The meeting began with an address by Ismael Ahmed, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, who spoke to the participants about the importance of getting the vote out by taking a broad approach and reaching out to different communities. He added that engaging the younger generation, specifically college students, will be imperative in the coming months.

The attendees then broke into smaller groups to discuss key areas of the election process, including voter registration, absentee ballots, and reaching out to the younger generation of Arab American voters. Among the topics discussed were ways to make sure that every registered voter is able to cast their vote on the day of the election. Many agreed that absentee ballots, which have determined many close races in the past, will be a major focal point in this year's election process.

Of equal importance was the issue of member outreach. The meeting's participants explored different ways of reaching out to voters, including the use of online social networks, and door-to-door campaigns.

During his remarks, Brewer emphasized the importance of the Arab American caucus in the upcoming election. He said that Arab Americans will have an influential role in both the presidential and local elections.

"This caucus is an extremely important part of this state's Democratic Party, and Michigan will be a very important part of the presidential election," he stated. "It's going to be a hard fight."

Brewer also spoke about several local elections that will be of great importance in November, including several seats in the Michigan House of Representatives. He claimed that it would take considerable efforts to keep the majority in the State House.

Senior Representatives from the campaigns for Senators Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama met with the participants to advocate for their respective candidates.

Michigan Rep. Pam Byrnes spoke about Clinton, whom she believed to be the best choice for president. She said that Clinton's life experiences have helped build her strong character.

"I am supporting Sen. Clinton because she has proven to be a hardworking, compassionate person," she claimed. "She has been through a lot in her life, and I see her resiliency as a great strength. She is the right person for the job."

Rep. Bert Johnson, who attended on behalf of the Obama campaign, claimed that Senator Obama is the country's best chance at repairing the damage that was created by the current administration.

"We have a chance in this election to restore our image and show people around the world that we are good people," Johnson stated. "Sen. Obama truly represents the masses. He is the one person who can go abroad and fix the mistakes that have been made."

Both Johnson and Byrnes agreed that party unity is the most important thing to consider during the actual election. While many of those in attendance supported a specific candidate, most agreed that whoever prevails as the Democratic nominee will get their vote.

Following their remarks, the representatives took part in a question and answer session where participants inquired about issues of concern that they felt will play an important role in the upcoming election.

"The meeting far exceeded our expectations," continued Salhab. "There was high level of enthusiasm, and people wanted to get involved in all levels of the process. The fact that people took half a day on a Saturday to participate in this gathering is a sign that our community is ready and willing to play an active role in the upcoming election."

To learn more about the Michigan Democratic Party, and to find out how to become more involved in the 2008 Election, visit www.michigandems.com.

Michigan Department of Human Services Media Advisory

Contact: Maureen Sorbet or Colleen Steinman (517) 373-7394

DHS and partners announcing key step in child welfare reform

WHAT:

The Michigan Department of Human Services, along with strategic partners, will make a key announcement about its efforts to reform the child welfare system.

WHEN:

11 a.m., Tuesday, April 22, 2008

WHERE:

Michigan's Children
428 W. Lenawee Street
Lansing, Michigan 48333-2240

WHO:

Ismael Ahmed, director, Michigan Department of Human Services.
C. Patrick Babcock, former director, Michigan Department of Social Services.

Carol Goss, president and CEO, Skillman Foundation.

Kathryne O'Grady, deputy director for children's services, Michigan Department of Human Services.

Jack Kresnak, president and CEO, Michigan's Children.

Marvis Cofield, foster parent.

DIRECTIONS:

Michigan's Children is at the northeast corner of Lenawee and Chestnut streets. Limited on-street parking is available along the east-bound section of Lenawee and the north-bound section of Chestnut. The nearest public parking lot is located two blocks north, to the east of Constitution Hall.

For more information or to confirm attendance, please contact Colleen Steinman at (517) 373-7394.